

THE ANDZNAGIR

News for the American citizen community in Armenia

ISSUE 3: APRIL 2015, FOCUS ON CRISIS PREPARATION



For further information:

- See the [State Department's travel website](#) for the [Worldwide Caution](#), [Travel Warnings](#), [Travel Alerts](#), and [Country Information for Armenia](#).
- Enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to receive security messages and make it easier to locate you in an emergency.
- Contact the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, Armenia, located at 1 American Avenue, at tel. (374-10) 46-47-00 and fax (374 10) 46-47-42, Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. After-hours emergency number for U.S. citizens is (374-10) 49-44-44.

Read-out of our town hall held on March 24

Over 30 American citizens were able to attend, and we thank them for coming! For those of you unable to make it, here's a quick summary of what took place. First, Ambassador Mills addressed the group, explaining his four priorities for his tenure in Armenia. (If you would like to read his speech, [click here](#).) Next, Consular Chief Frank Tu addressed some concerns related to visa policies and procedures. After, staff from the American Citizen Services unit addressed common issues for local Amcits. Among the topics discussed were voting, tax filing, double taxation, dual citizenship, and apostille services for U.S. civil documents. If you have any questions relating to these issues—or about anything else—please don't hesitate to contact us.

Make sure your voice is heard!

Don't forget that you can participate in the voting process from overseas. There will be a presidential election in November, and primaries are taking place now. To participate, you need to register using your last physical address in the United States, even if you have no current connection to that address. You can register by contacting the registrar of voters for your county and following their instructions or by visiting www.fvap.gov. Be sure to request an absentee ballot here in Armenia. Pay close attention to cut-off dates by which you must register to vote and return your ballots: these vary by state. Increasingly, many states, like California, will send you an absentee ballot by email and allow you to return your ballots the same way, saving time and trouble. If your state still uses a physical ballot, you can place your ballot in the ballot box at the embassy's security checkpoint. Though the diplomatic pouch is slow, we will date-stamp the ballots to ensure that they are counted when they arrive. Don't forget to affix U.S. postage if your envelope is not postage-paid. Visit www.fvap.gov for the answers to all your voting-related questions.

The U.S. Embassy will be closed for the following holidays—a weekday before or after April 24 (Remembrance Day), a weekday before or after May 1 (Labor Day), May 9 (Victory and Peace Day), May 30 (U.S. Memorial Day).

CRISIS PREPARATION, THE STATE DEPARTMENT, THE EMBASSY, AND YOU

Clarification of registration with the Embassy: At the town hall there were a few complaints about Americans not receiving email messages from the Embassy even though they believed themselves to be registered. We need to emphasize that the only means of registering is via the Internet at step.state.gov/step, that ACS staff do not have the ability to register on your behalf, and that you are not registered by virtue of appearing at the embassy for a service. In addition, registration is country-specific and time-sensitive. Having once registered in a different country does not mean you receive messages for Amcits in Armenia; and if you included a closing date in the past, your registration has lapsed. Lastly, providing an updated email address and/or phone number on a recent passport application, for instance, does not update the contact information in your registration. With an eye on crisis preparedness, it is imperative that all American citizens be registered with us and that your contact information be up-to-date. The U.S. Department of State will not disclose the information you provide us in your STEP application to any third parties unless you have given us written authorization to do so or unless the disclosure is otherwise permitted by the Privacy Act (5 USC 552a). We urge you to go to step.state.gov/step and verify that your registration is current and accurate.

Receiving security messages by text: As some of you may know, if you have provided a cell phone number with your registration, American Citizen Services has been sending you short message service (SMS) texts informing you about new security messages that have been posted to the embassy's website, in addition to sending you email messages. The SMS system appears not to be working at this time, but the Embassy is working hard to resolve the issue. In the meantime, in addition to email, U.S. citizens can consider signing up for RSS feeds [here](#).



Keeping your travel documents up-to-date: Again, with an eye towards crisis preparedness, it is important to ensure that all of your travel documents are valid should you need to leave Armenia. Please check your passports; and if they have expired or are close to doing so, please make an appointment to see us about a renewal as soon as possible. Given that you cannot travel to some countries without a minimum of six months' validity, consider starting the renewal process as early as eight months before your passport expires. This reminder about passports, of course, presupposes that the births of any children who may qualify for American citizenship have been reported to the embassy and that consular reports of birth abroad have been issued. If not, please do not delay taking care of this. Recently, the daughter of an American citizen was denied a U.S. visa—as it is illegal to place a U.S. visa in the foreign passport of a person believed to be a U.S. citizen. American citizens must travel to the U.S. on U.S. passports, and their American citizenship must be adjudicated first, before passports or a visa can be issued.



As always, we welcome your comments, questions and feedback. Please write to us at acsyerevan@state.gov

Do you know what the “No Double Standard” policy is?

In 1990, Congress passed the Aviation Security Improvement Act; Section 109 added a requirement that the President "develop guidelines for ensuring notification to the public of threats to civil aviation in appropriate cases." The Act requires that the guidelines identify the officials responsible for deciding whether public notification of a threat is in the best interests of the United States and the traveling public based on a consideration of, inter alia, the specificity of the threat, the credibility of the information, and the ability to counter the threat. The guidelines were to be distributed to appropriate officials in the Departments of Transportation, State, and Justice, as well as to air carriers. The law prohibits notification of a threat only to a limited set of American citizens unless only that set of Americans is threatened.

In other words, the “No Double Standard” policy means that, by law, any security warning sent out to members of the U.S. embassy community must also be sent out to private American citizens. If our security office deems that a street protest, for instance, warrants a warning to embassy employees to avoid a specific area, that message will be sent as well to all private Americans registered in the embassy’s consular district. At all times, you can rest assured that we are doing our best to keep you informed and to keep you safe, and everything we know we will pass along to you... ***as long as you are registered with us through STEP.***

Your personal preparations in advance of a crisis: In addition to keeping your travel documents up-to-date and registering with us and/or updating your registration through STEP (addressed above), there are other things you can do to ensure that you and your family will be prepared in the event of a major crisis. For instance, have you added the Embassy’s phone numbers to the address book of your mobile phone? (These can be found in the sidebar on page one.) What about the number for the Office of Overseas Citizen Services in Washington (see



below)? Do you have medical insurance that covers you while you are outside the United States? What about insurance for medical evacuation should you experience an injury or develop a condition that requires immediate return to the U. S. for treatment? Lastly, have you prepared a “go” bag? A “go” bag is a small suitcase containing absolute essentials that you can snatch up if you need to evacuate quickly and there is no time to pack. Such a suitcase might contain a change or two of clothing, important documents, cash in a major currency, a cell phone charger, an extra pair of glasses, some snack food and bottled water, etc. If you have small children, it might contain toys; if you take medication, it might contain a few weeks’ supply. Tailor your “go” bag to the specific needs of you and your family.

**The Office of Overseas Citizen Services in Washington can be reached by dialing
+1 202-501-4444.**



How the Embassy can help you in a crisis: ACS chief Adam Colvin explains

What is the Department of State's role during a crisis overseas? Do you always evacuate U.S. citizens?

The actions we take depend on the nature of the crisis. In some instances, we may only need to provide information on conditions in the country, such as warnings about areas of unrest, how and where to seek help, and other useful advice. In more serious situations, we may recommend that U.S. citizens leave the foreign country and, if commercial transportation is not available, provide departure assistance as our resources permit.

What departure assistance do you provide? Why do you tell U.S. citizens they should leave but not offer transportation?

The assistance we provide depends upon the nature of the crisis. Regularly-scheduled commercial flights are always the best option when local communications and transportation infrastructure are intact and operating normally. Our efforts will be devoted to keeping the U.S. citizen community informed of developments and travel options.

What happens during an evacuation?

Each evacuation depends on the nature of the crisis. In extreme situations, where local infrastructure is damaged, we work with the host government, other countries, and other U.S. government agencies to arrange chartered or non-commercial transportation for U.S. citizens to depart. This could include transportation by air or land. While we partner closely with the Department of Defense, military options are only used as a last resort. You should not expect the U.S. military to assist you if we issue a Travel Warning advising you to leave a country.



How can I receive updated information during a crisis?

We encourage all U.S. citizens traveling abroad, especially citizens who plan to be overseas for a significant amount of time, to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). It is important that you keep your contact information up-to-date so that we can notify you or your designated emergency contact of developments and provide valuable information.

Also be sure to monitor the Embassy website, as well as travel.state.gov, for updates, as these are our primary tools for disseminating important information during a crisis. Our Facebook and Twitter accounts are also good sources of information. Rest assured that in case of a crisis, we will make use of all available modes of communication to keep our citizens informed, including the Internet, social media, TV, and radio.

What if I don't have access to e-mail or phone?



We know that Internet and cell phone service are sometimes interrupted during a crisis. Land line phones might also be affected. In such cases, we will use television and radio to broadcast emergency information and may also use a system of pre-designated U.S. citizen "wardens" to pass on information to other U.S. citizens in their area. When the Internet and phone services are still up and running, we encourage citizens to reach out to family and friends outside the affected area to obtain information and relay messages to and from the task force handling the crisis at the Department of State. Don't underestimate the power of social media – regularly updating your status through social media sites is an effective way to let your loved ones know how you are doing.

What about my family and friends who are not U.S. citizens? Will you help them depart the country?

During a crisis, our priority is assisting U.S. citizens. You should not expect to bring friends or relatives who are not U.S. citizens on U.S. government chartered or non-commercial transportation. Exceptions may be made to accommodate special family circumstances, such as when the spouse of a U.S. citizen is a legal permanent resident, or "green card" holder; however, it is the non-U.S. citizen's responsibility to be sure he or she has appropriate travel documentation for the destination location. Any services provided to non-U.S. citizens are on a space-available basis after U.S. citizens are accommodated.

What happens to visa processing during a crisis?

In a crisis, our priority is assisting U.S. citizens. Depending on the nature and extent of the crisis, visa processing could be limited or suspended.



More information can be found [here](#).



Thank you for reading this issue of The Andznagir!